

A Study on Translation Strategies of Metro Prompt Words under Skopos Theory

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Abstract— *In the context of frequent international exchanges around the world, metro prompt words also play an important role in cultural communication. This paper takes Skopos Theory as the theoretical perspective to explore the translation strategies of metro prompt words. After analyzing the importance, research progress and trends of metro prompt words, this paper puts forward targeted translation strategies based on the three rules of Skopos Theory, and verifies the effectiveness of the strategies with examples of prompt words in different scenarios such as station entry, riding and exit. Finally, it puts forward optimization suggestions such as strengthening translator training, establishing a quality review mechanism and unifying translation standards, and discusses the enlightenment of Skopos Theory to the translation of other public signs. This study enriches the application of Skopos Theory in the field of public sign translation and provides a reference for the translation practice of metro prompt words.*



Keywords— *Skopos Theory, metro prompt words, translation strategies, cross-cultural communication*

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background and Significance

With the accelerating process of globalization, the internationalization level of cities continues to improve. As an important part of urban transportation, the metro is not only a convenient way to travel, but also an important window to display the city's image and culture. Metro prompt words are the key basis for foreign passengers to obtain travel information. Accurate and appropriate translation can provide convenience for them, while poor

translation may cause confusion and even affect the international image of the city (Li Hong 2018:15).

As an important theory in translation studies, Skopos Theory breaks the bondage of the equivalence principle in traditional translation theories and emphasizes the dominant role of translation purpose in the translation process. The application of Skopos Theory in the translation of metro prompt words can pay more attention to the needs and backgrounds of target readers, making translation more targeted and practical (Zhang Xiaoming

2020:23). Applying Skopos Theory to the research on metro prompt word translation can not only expand the application boundary of this theory in the field of specific public signs and improve its theoretical system in practical text translation, but also put forward practical translation strategies according to the situational and functional characteristics of metro prompt words, solve practical problems in current translation, improve the overall quality of metro prompt word translation, and support the international construction of urban transportation services.

1.2 Research Methods and Innovations

This study comprehensively adopts the case analysis method and literature research method to ensure the in-depth and comprehensive research. Among them, the case analysis method collects and sorts out a large number of prompt word examples from metro systems in different cities, conducts detailed analysis on these cases, deeply discusses the specific application of Skopos Theory in metro prompt word translation, and observes how translation strategies of different types of prompt words change with translation purposes (Wang Fang 2019:35). The literature research method systematically sorts out relevant research results of Skopos Theory and public sign translation at home and abroad, clarifies the development context and core connotation of Skopos Theory, and lays a solid theoretical foundation for the research.

The innovations of this study are reflected in two aspects: first, the pertinence of the research perspective, breaking through the simple language comparison or skill analysis in previous studies on metro prompt word translation, taking Skopos Theory as a systematic theoretical framework, discussing strategy selection from the perspective of translation purpose, and strengthening the theoretical depth of the research; second, the practicality of the research content, focusing on the situational characteristics of metro prompt words, analyzing the differences in translation purposes of prompt words with different functions and scenarios, putting forward operable targeted strategies, and making up for the

insufficient combination of strategies and practice in previous studies.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Core Connotation and Rules of Skopos Theory

Skopos Theory originated in Germany in the 1970s as the core component of the functionalist translation theory. It was first proposed by Hans Vermeer and perfected by scholars such as Katharina Reiss, Justa Holz-Mänttari and Christiane Nord, forming a systematic theoretical system. This theory breaks the shackles of traditional text-centered translation theories, defines translation as a purposeful communicative act, and holds that the purpose of translation determines all decisions in the translation process, providing a new theoretical guide for practical text translation.

Skopos Theory includes three core rules, namely the Skopos Rule, the Coherence Rule and the Fidelity Rule. As the primary rule of Skopos Theory, the Skopos Rule holds that the purpose to be achieved by the translation act determines the whole process of the translation act, that is, the purpose of translation determines the strategies and methods of translation (Vermeer 1989:22). The core purpose of metro prompt word translation is to provide clear and accurate information for foreign passengers to facilitate their smooth travel, which is the fundamental basis for the selection of all translation strategies. The Coherence Rule requires that the target text must meet the standard of intratextual coherence, that is, the target text is readable and acceptable in the target language culture and the communicative context where the target text is used, and can be understood by the target readers (Nord 1991:34). The Fidelity Rule means that there should be intertextual coherence between the source text and the target text, that is, the target text should be faithful to the content and intention of the source text, but the degree and form of such faithfulness depend on the purpose of translation (Reiss & Vermeer 1984:108). The three rules

support each other and jointly form the theoretical guidance framework for metro prompt word translation.

2.2 Research Status at Home and Abroad

Abroad, Skopos Theory has received extensive attention and research since its proposal. Many scholars have conducted in-depth discussions on the theoretical connotation, application fields and the relationship with other translation theories of Skopos Theory. In terms of the expansion of theoretical connotation, scholars have continuously refined and improved the core concepts of Skopos Theory. For example, the classification of translation purposes is more detailed. In addition to the traditional communicative purpose of the target text, scholars have also deeply studied the influence of the translator's personal purpose, the commercial purpose of the translation project and other factors on translation strategies (Nord 2001:56). In terms of application fields, Skopos Theory is widely used in the translation research of various text types such as literature, business, science and technology, and law. In literary translation research, scholars discuss how to use Skopos Theory to retain the original literary style while making the target text more in line with the reading habits and aesthetic needs of target readers, so as to realize the dissemination and acceptance of literary works in the target language culture (Hermans 1999:45). In the field of business translation, the research focuses on how to accurately translate business contracts, business letters and other texts according to the purpose and needs of business activities, so as to ensure the accurate transmission of information and the smooth progress of business activities (Hatim & Mason 1997:34).

In the research on public sign translation, foreign scholars have analyzed from multiple perspectives such as language, culture and function. From the linguistic perspective, they study the linguistic characteristics of public signs and their transformation rules in translation, emphasizing that the target text should conform to the grammatical and lexical norms of the target language; from the cultural perspective, they pay attention to the

differences in cultural connotations carried by public signs under different cultural backgrounds, and how to make cultural adaptive adjustments in translation to avoid cultural conflicts (Katan 2004:23); from the functional perspective, guided by Skopos Theory, they discuss how to select appropriate translation strategies according to the functions of public signs (such as indication, warning, promotion, etc.) to achieve the expected functions of public signs in the target language environment (Schäffner 1998:18). For example, for the translation of public signs in tourist attractions, foreign scholars believe that their publicity and guidance functions should be highlighted, and attractive language and cultural adaptive strategies should be adopted to attract foreign tourists and help them better understand the scenic culture.

Domestic research on Skopos Theory started relatively late but developed rapidly. On the one hand, scholars have deeply introduced, digested and absorbed the theoretical system of Skopos Theory, and made the domestic academic circle have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of Skopos Theory through translating and interpreting relevant foreign literature; on the other hand, combined with China's translation practice and cultural background, they have conducted localized research and application of Skopos Theory. In theoretical research, the core rules of Skopos Theory are deeply analyzed, and the interrelationship and application priority of the Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule and Fidelity Rule in different translation situations are discussed (Zhong Weihe, Zhong Yu 1999:25). In applied research, Skopos Theory is widely used in the translation research of various texts, including literature, film and television, advertising, public signs and so on.

In the research on the translation of public signs such as metro prompt words, domestic scholars use Skopos Theory to analyze the problems existing in current translation and put forward corresponding improvement strategies. Through the analysis of a large number of examples of metro prompt word translation, problems such

as non-standard language expression, inaccurate transmission of cultural information and unclear translation purpose are found. In response to these problems, scholars based on Skopos Theory propose that the translation purpose should be clarified according to the needs and backgrounds of foreign passengers, and appropriate translation strategies should be selected, such as free translation, addition, omission and substitution, to make translation more accurate, clear and easy to understand (Huang Youyi 2005:30; He Xueyun 2006:42). For words with Chinese characteristics such as “安检”, if directly translated as “Security Check”, foreign passengers may not fully understand its meaning, and it can be translated as “Security Check for Baggage and Persons” by addition to convey information more accurately.

However, there are still some deficiencies in current research. In the applied research of Skopos Theory, although a wide range of text types are involved, for highly concise texts such as metro prompt words, some studies lack in-depth exploration and accurate grasp of translation purpose when analyzing translation problems, resulting in weak pertinence of the proposed translation strategies. There are few comparative studies on the translation of metro prompt words in different regions and cultural backgrounds, which cannot fully reflect the diversity of translation purposes and strategies.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTERISTICS AND TRANSLATION STATUS OF METRO PROMPT WORDS

3.1 Linguistic Characteristics of Metro Prompt Words

As functional public signs serving public transportation, the language expression of metro prompt words needs to conform to the scenario characteristics of metro operation and passengers' information acquisition needs, and mainly presents three characteristics: first, conciseness. Metro passengers have high mobility and tight schedules, so prompt words need to convey core information with concise language, avoid lengthy

expressions, and ensure that passengers can quickly capture key content in a short time. For example, “小心碰头” and “先下后上” all convey information with minimal words; second, accuracy. Words must be precise and unambiguous, which is directly related to passengers' understanding and travel safety. For example, the word “倚靠” in “请勿倚靠车门” accurately defines the behavior boundary to avoid safety risks caused by vague words; third, standardization. It is necessary to follow the industry translation standards for public signs in public places to realize the unification of vocabulary and sentence patterns, which is convenient for passengers to identify and understand, and reflects the standardized management level of the city.

3.2 Current Translation Status and Problems of Metro Prompt Words

3.2.1 Common Types of Translation Errors

At present, various linguistic errors occur frequently in the translation of metro prompt words, which directly affect the effect of information transmission: first, spelling errors, such as misspelling “Approaching” as “Apporoaching” and “Emergency” as “Emergancy”. Such seemingly small errors are likely to cause cognitive confusion for foreign passengers, and even delay judgment in emergency scenarios; second, grammatical errors, including subject-verb disagreement, misuse of parts of speech, abnormal tense and other problems. For example, translating “请勿在车厢内饮食” as “Don't eating and drinking in the carriage” violates the grammatical rules of English imperative sentences and reduces the credibility of the translation; third, improper word choice, which does not conform to English expression habits. For example, translating “请保管好您的随身物品” as “Please keep well your personal belongings”, “keep well” is a non-standard collocation and is likely to cause obstacles to understanding.

3.2.2 Analysis of the Reasons Affecting Translation Accuracy

The translation problems of metro prompt words are the result of the joint action of many factors: first, uneven translator levels. Some translators lack solid English language skills, do not have a precise grasp of English grammar and lexical collocation, and have not received professional translation training, and lack awareness of the function-oriented public sign translation, so they are prone to mechanical literal translation; second, there are differences between Chinese and Western ways of thinking and expression habits. For example, the literal translation of the Chinese “小心碰头” as “Be careful of hitting your head” does not conform to the concise expression habits of English. If translators do not fully consider such differences, the translation is likely to be unnatural and difficult to understand; third, the lack of unified translation standards and review mechanisms. Although some cities have formulated English translation standards for public places, there are problems such as inconsistent standards and inadequate implementation in practice. The translation of the same prompt word varies in different lines and cities, and the lack of strict review and supervision leads to the long-term existence of wrong translations.

IV. ANALYSIS OF TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR METRO PROMPT WORDS

4.1 Translation Strategies Following the Skopos Rule

The Skopos Rule is the fundamental basis for the selection of translation strategies for metro prompt words. Before translation, it is necessary to clarify the core translation purpose—providing clear, accurate and practical information for foreign passengers—according to the functional types of prompt words (station entry guidance, safety prompts, service information) and usage scenarios, and then select appropriate methods such as literal translation, free translation, addition and omission.

Literal translation is applicable to prompt words with similar expression habits between the source text and the target language and no cultural ambiguity. It can convey core information concisely and efficiently while retaining the original information, and is the most commonly used method in metro prompt word translation. For example, “出口” is translated as “Exit”, “入口” as “Entrance”, and “请勿吸烟” as “NO SMOKING”, which directly correspond to common English expressions, concise and clear, and easy for passengers to understand.

Free translation is applicable to prompt words with unique Chinese expressions that are likely to cause obstacles to understanding if literally translated. It is necessary to flexibly convert according to English expression habits on the basis of being faithful to the core meaning of the original text. For example, “小心碰头” is freely translated as “Mind your head”, and “小心地滑” as “Caution: Wet Floor”, which not only retain the warning function but also conform to the expression norms of English public signs.

Addition is applicable to prompt words with Chinese cultural characteristics or implied information. By adding necessary information, foreign passengers can be helped to understand the core meaning. For example, “请在黄线外候车” is translated as “Please wait behind the yellow line. This line is set for your safety.”, adding the function of the yellow line to make up for the differences caused by cultural cognition; “安检” is translated as “Security Screening for Baggage and Persons”, adding the content of security check to avoid vague information.

Omission omits redundant polite expressions or modifiers without affecting the transmission of original information, conforming to the concise characteristics of metro prompt words. For example, “请您注意脚下安全, 防止滑倒” is simplified as “Watch your step. Mind the wet floor.”, omitting redundant expressions such as “请您” to highlight core information.

4.2 Translation Strategies Following the Coherence Rule

The Coherence Rule requires that the target text has intratextual coherence and is deeply integrated with the actual usage context of the metro, ensuring that foreign passengers can easily understand and accept it quickly.

On the one hand, it is necessary to ensure intratextual coherence of the target text in grammar, vocabulary and logic: grammatically, strictly follow English grammatical rules and correctly use sentence patterns, tenses and parts of speech. For example, “列车即将进站” is translated as “The train is approaching”, avoiding grammatical errors such as “Train will approaching”; lexically, select common words in English public signs to ensure standard collocation. For example, “贵重物品” is translated as “valuable items” rather than the uncommon “precious things”; logically, sort out the information order to conform to passengers’ information acquisition habits. For example, “此站可换乘 2 号线和 5 号线, 换乘通道在站台右侧” is translated by first stating the transfer lines and then pointing out the location of the transfer passage to realize logically clear information transmission.

On the other hand, the target text needs to conform to the usage context of the metro and passengers’ needs: the metro environment is characterized by dense crowds, complex information and tight schedules, so the target text should be concise and avoid redundancy; adjust the translation expression according to passengers’ psychological states in different scenarios. For example, during peak hours, the prompt “车门即将关闭” is translated as “The door is closing”, concise and powerful, conforming to the tense context of passengers rushing for the train; during off-peak hours, polite expressions can be appropriately added. For example, “请有序候车” is translated as “Please wait in an orderly manner”, reflecting the affinity of the service.

4.3 Translation Strategies Under the Fidelity Rule

The Fidelity Rule requires that the target text maintain intertextual coherence with the source text, and

be faithful to the core information and cultural connotation of the source text on the premise of achieving the translation purpose, so as to avoid information omission, distortion or cultural conflicts.

First, it is necessary to be faithful to the core information of the original text, convey the content and function of the prompt words completely and accurately, and not arbitrarily delete or tamper with key information. For example, for “禁止携带易燃、易爆、有毒物品进站”, the translation must fully cover the categories of prohibited items to avoid safety risks caused by missing information; for “列车因前方故障临时停车”, the translation must clearly state the reason for the stop to avoid passengers’ anxiety due to unclear information.

Second, it is necessary to take into account cultural faithfulness, deeply understand the cultural connotation contained in the original text, accurately convey and realize cultural adaptation in the translation, and avoid misunderstandings caused by cultural differences. For prompt words containing traditional Chinese culture, such as “尊老爱幼” and “文明乘车”, addition can be used to explain the cultural connotation while conveying the core meaning. For example, “请文明乘车, 尊老爱幼” is translated as “Please travel in a civilized manner. Respect the old and love the young, an important virtue in Chinese culture.”, allowing foreign passengers to perceive Chinese cultural connotation while understanding behavioral requirements.

V. CASE ANALYSIS

5.1 Selection of Different Types of Metro Prompt Words

To deeply explore the application of Skopos Theory in the translation of metro prompt words, prompt words in different scenarios such as station entry prompts, riding prompts and exit prompts are selected as cases. These cases cover the main links of metro travel and can fully demonstrate the important role of Skopos Theory in guiding the selection of translation strategies.

In the station entry link, the prompt word “请在安检处接受安检” is selected. The purpose of this prompt is to guide passengers to cooperate with security check to ensure the safety of metro operation. During riding, the prompt word “请给有需要的乘客让座” reflects riding etiquette and humanistic care, and its translation purpose is to convey the concept of civilized riding. When exiting the station, “请从该出口出站” is used to indicate the exit direction for passengers, and accurate and clear information transmission is its main purpose. Through the translation analysis of these different types of prompt words, the translation strategies from the perspective of Skopos Theory can be studied more pertinently.

5.2 Analysis of the Application of Translation Strategies Based on Skopos Theory

5.2.1 Application of the Skopos Rule

Take “请在安检处接受安检” as an example. Its translation purpose is to let foreign passengers clearly know that they need to cooperate with security check at a specific location to ensure the safety of metro operation. In translation, it is literally translated as “Please undergo security inspection at the security checkpoint”. This translation method directly and accurately conveys the original information, conforming to the Skopos Rule. Because for foreign passengers, clear and direct instructions are crucial in the metro travel scenario. Such translation allows them to quickly understand and take corresponding actions to ensure the smooth progress of the security check process, thus achieving the purpose of ensuring the safe operation of the metro.

The translation purpose of the prompt word “请给有需要的乘客让座” is to convey the concept of civilized riding and advocate passengers to carry forward the spirit of mutual assistance. Translated as “Please offer your seat to passengers in need”, this translation is concise and clear, directly conveying to passengers that the object of the seat-offering request is “passengers in need”, enabling foreign passengers to understand that they should pay attention to the needs of others and take the initiative to

offer seats during metro riding, achieving the purpose of spreading the concept of civilized riding. If the translation is too complicated or obscure, it may not effectively convey this concept and fail to achieve the expected communicative purpose.

The translation purpose of “请从该出口出站” is to indicate the exit direction for passengers to ensure they can exit smoothly. Translated as “Please exit through this exit”, it directly corresponds to the original information, allowing passengers to quickly understand which exit to leave the metro station. In the metro exit scenario, passengers often want to find the exit quickly, and this concise and direct translation can meet their needs and help them successfully complete the last link of travel, conforming to the requirements of the Skopos Rule for translation.

5.2.2 Application of the Coherence Rule

In terms of intratextual coherence, “列车即将进站, 请在黄线外候车” is translated as “The train is approaching. Please wait behind the yellow line.” Grammatically, “is approaching” is a correct present continuous tense expression used to describe the upcoming arrival of the train, conforming to English grammatical rules; lexically, words such as “approaching”, “wait” and “behind” are used accurately and appropriately, and “yellow line” is a common English expression, conforming to English vocabulary habits; logically, it first states that the train is approaching and then informs passengers to wait behind the yellow line, with clear logic, enabling foreign passengers to understand the prompt content naturally and smoothly, achieving intratextual coherence.

In terms of integration with the context, take “请抓紧时间上车, 车门即将关闭” as an example. In the tense context of the metro train about to depart, it is translated as “Please board the train quickly. The doors are closing”. Expressions such as “board the train” and “are closing” are concise and clear, in line with the tense departure context, enabling passengers to understand and take action in a

short time, successfully realizing the integration of translation and context.

5.2.3 Application of the Fidelity Rule

The translation of “请在指定区域候车” as “Please wait in the designated area” is completely faithful to the original information. “指定区域” corresponds to “designated area”, accurately conveying the requirement for passengers to wait in a specific area without any omission or distortion of information, ensuring that passengers can obtain accurate waiting location information.

In terms of cultural faithfulness, “新春快乐，阖家团圆” is translated as “Happy Chinese New Year! May your family be together in harmony during this special festival.” It not only conveys festival blessings but also explains in detail the meaning of “阖家团圆” in the Spring Festival culture, allowing foreign passengers to deeply understand the importance of family reunion in Chinese Spring Festival culture and faithfully conveying the cultural connotation contained in the original text.

VI. CONCLUSION

6.1 Summary of Research Findings

This study deeply analyzes the translation strategies of metro prompt words from the perspective of Skopos Theory and achieves a series of achievements with theoretical and practical value. At the theoretical level, it systematically expounds the origin, development and core rules of Skopos Theory, clarifies the interrelationship and dominant role of the Skopos Rule, Coherence Rule and Fidelity Rule in the translation process, and enriches the theoretical research of Skopos Theory in the field of public sign translation.

Through the analysis of the linguistic characteristics and translation status of metro prompt words, this paper reveals the linguistic characteristics of conciseness, accuracy and standardization of metro prompt words, points out the problems such as spelling errors, grammatical errors and improper word choice in current

translation, and deeply analyzes the causes of these problems such as translator levels, cultural differences and the lack of unified standards.

Based on Skopos Theory, a series of targeted translation strategies are proposed. Guided by the Skopos Rule, it is necessary to fully consider the needs and backgrounds of foreign passengers and the scenarios where prompt words are located to clarify the translation purpose, and achieve the translation purpose through literal translation, free translation, addition, omission and other methods. In terms of the Coherence Rule, ensure that the target text is coherent in grammar, vocabulary and logic, and closely integrated with the metro environment and passengers' needs. The Fidelity Rule requires faithful transmission of original information to avoid information omission or distortion, and pay attention to cultural faithfulness to accurately convey the cultural connotation of the original text and avoid cultural misunderstandings and conflicts.

Through case analysis of different types of metro prompt words such as station entry prompts, riding prompts and exit prompts, the effectiveness and practicality of translation strategies from the perspective of Skopos Theory are verified. These strategies can accurately convey information and realize effective communication with passengers according to the purposes and functions of different prompt words.

6.2 Research Deficiencies and Prospects

Although this study has achieved certain results, there are still limitations. In terms of research scope, it mainly focuses on common types of metro prompt words, and less research on prompt words related to special scenarios or emerging businesses, such as metro barrier-free facility prompts and metro commercial activity prompts. With the continuous expansion of metro functions and increasingly diversified services, the translation of these special prompt words also needs in-depth discussion. In terms of research methods, it mainly adopts case analysis and literature research methods, lacking empirical research. In the future,

questionnaires, interviews and other methods can be used to collect feedback from foreign passengers on the translation of metro prompt words, so as to more directly understand their needs and understanding, and provide a more powerful basis for the optimization of translation strategies.

Looking forward, Skopos Theory has broad development space in the field of metro prompt word translation research. With the gradual deepening of the application of artificial intelligence technology in the field of translation, how to combine Skopos Theory with artificial intelligence technology to improve the efficiency and quality of metro prompt word translation is a direction worthy of research. It is possible to explore the establishment of a metro prompt word translation corpus based on Skopos Theory, summarize translation rules and patterns through big data analysis, and provide a more accurate reference for translation practice. With the acceleration of urban internationalization, comparative research on metro prompt word translation in different cities will also be of great significance. By comparing the differences in translation strategies and standards among different cities, summarizing experiences and lessons, promoting exchanges and cooperation among cities, jointly improving the overall level of metro prompt word translation, better serving international passengers and showing the international image of the city.

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